

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**THE WORKING PEOPLE OF LOWELL
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
MARY BLEWETT/MARTHA MAYO**

**INFORMANT: SYLVIA CONTOVER
INTERVIEWER: PAT COBLE
DATE: OCTOBER 10, 1985**

**P = PAT
S = SYLVIA**

Tape 85.30

Tape begins with some easy listening music.

P: This is Pat Coble and I am interviewing Sylvia Contover at her home on Middlesex Street, on October 31, 1985. On October 30th, 1985. Can you tell me something about your grandparents Sylvia? Where they were born?

S: Umhm. My grandparents were born in Greece. My, my, also my parents were also born in Greece. And my, when my mother was in this country and married she brought her mother over. So one of my grandparents did come to this country.

P: I see. What part of Greece were they from?

S: Well my mother was from Evvoia. This is a long island near the mainland, Greece. And my father comes from Asia Minor. And would you like to know how they came about for them to meet?

P: Yes, I was going to ask you how they met.

S: Okay. They came to this country separately. My father was here on his own. I won't go into his previous history because it's interesting but, I don't think it has anything to do with the history of Lowell, except that he came as an immigrant. Maybe I'll come back to it. My father was a monk in a monastery. In fact, he was a temporary Abbott at Mount Athos Monastery in Greece. And he had a brother. And he went to that monastery, because when he was eighteen years old he saw a painting of an icon, and he made up his mind that he was gonna learn how to paint. So he went to that monastery to learn how to paint, and became a brother, and then a temporary Abbott for two years.

And he had a brother who was a physician in New York City. And his brother wrote to him, "Come to America, this is the place for us." Because they had problems in Turkey. Asia Minor was now Turkey and they didn't want the Greek and the Armenians, they gave them a difficult time. So they would, had, most of them had to leave. But in the meantime my uncle had come to America. He had, my uncle had gone to Medical School in Turkey, in Athens, Greece and in New York City. e went to the University of New York and was a surgeon in New York City. He wrote to his brother and he said, "This is the place for us. If you'd like to leave the monastery come here." So my father came to New York. In the meantime his brother, the doctor, wanted to go into religious life. [Laughs] The brother had left, my brother came, my father came to New York, and was with friends who had come from the same village in Asia Minor. And they had, took care of him for awhile. But he was there for three months and there was no work. He couldn't get work as a painter because (--)

P: What year was this?

S: I think that was about 1911. And since he couldn't get work there, they were advertising in the Greek papers that they wanted help in the mills in Lowell. So he came to Lowell through that advertisement.

P: Oh, about 1911?

S: Yah.

P: 1912?

S: I would say about that time. So while he was in Lowell he met some man who was connected with the Greek Church here. And this, his, the man's name was (Niferopoulos?), Mr. (Niferopoulos?) said, "My wife and my two children will be coming from Greece, and there's, they have a young lady who's a neighbor and would like to bring her over." Do you think, do you think you'd be interested meeting her? And the agreement was made. And my mother came to America with her neighbors. And now Mr. (Niferopoulos?) was in Johnstown, New York at the time, by the time my mother came with this family. He had a small hotel there. So they came to that, to Johnstown, New York and my mother went to work at the (glove ?) factory. (P: Umhm). Nine months later my father was able to go to Johnstown and meet her. And they liked each other, and he brought her back to Lowell and married.

In those days, in the Greek community, there were not many eligible women for marriage. So if any girl came over, like my mother, there were many bachelors who were looking for them. But since she had sort of been, talked about with this man in Lowell, she was waiting to meet him first. [Laughs]

P: I see.

S: So anyhow. They got married in Lowell and they had six children. Now the oldest child she had at Lowell General Hospital, but they, he had a crib death. And my mother felt that, that child was not properly cared by the nurses. She somehow felt that the child was, the infant was smothered by the pillow. The nurses were not careful.

P: Oh, did he die in the hospital?

S: He died. (P: Oh) He died.

P: Oh [unclear].

S: So she had the rest, the five, the rest of the five at home. So we were all born at home (P: Umhm) with a midwife.

P: Where was home? Where did your parents live at this time?

S: Well when I was born, well I was born in Lynn. My oldest brother was born in Lowell. Then my parents went to Lynn for awhile. My father went into business there, but it didn't work out. They came back. I was born in Lynn but I was raised in Lowell. (P: Um) And, and my next brother was born when we all lived on Cross Street. Then they bought a house on Willie Street. And my two younger siblings were born there. And I sort of remember my sister's birth, and my younger brother's birth. And I must have been about six years old then. And my father said, "Oh look what the baby brought." And it was some nice big shiny apples. (P: Ah) So he gave us an apple. And that reminded me that the previous year, the previous baby had also brought apples. (Both Laugh) So that's why I think I remember my sister's birth. (P: Yah yah) She's four years younger than I am.

P: Now was this the Acre section when you say you were born (S: Yes) near the Acre?

S: Yes. (P: Ah huh) I grew up in the Acre.

P: In the Acre. Was it a Greek community there? Were your neighbors all Greek? Or was it a mixed?

S: Yes. Ah well, we were on the periphery of the Greek community. But they were Greeks on our street. But they were mostly Irish. (P: Umhm) Our neighborhood was mostly Irish. But I grew up in the Greek community because we went to church alot. [Laughs] There were services frequently. My mother liked to go to church at every opportunity. And that was entertainment for us in those days. (P: Umhm) We didn't have movies. Maybe movies were beginning to come in as we were growing up. What we (--) I remember we didn't even have electricity. We had gas light. I remember the lamp lighters would come around. On each corner there was a lamp post, and the lamp lighter would carry his little ladder, and climb up the lamp post, and turn on the light at dusk. That happened every evening.

P: Um.

S: So that was part of our life as children growing up. And we had gas in the homes. There were some homes that still had the lamps, you know, the kerosene lamps in those days.

P: Did you have running water, or how did you get your water [unclear]?

S: Okay, we had running water. (P: Oh yah) We had running water. We had toilets in the house. Running water and, but it was cold water in my house. Other people may have had hot water, but we didn't have hot water. We had to heat the water on the big black stove. Big galvanized pan. Wash tubs (P: Umhm) were put on the stove. And, but the water was heated that way. And we'd all take a bath in the kitchen. (P: Umhm) On a Saturday night we'd all take our turns taking a bath. But the stove would be stoked up. That was the only heat we had was the kitchen stove.

P: I was going to ask you what kind of heat they had then?

S: That's what we had. Others may have had central heating, I don't know, but I know we didn't have central heating.

P: Did you have any fireplaces in (--)

S: Not where I lived, no.

P: Ah huh. So it was just the heat in the kitchen then?

S: Yes.

P: Just the coal stove?

S: Yup. So we use to heat the, stoke the fire, make the fire, it was nice. We'd make sure, my mother would make sure the fire was nice and hot. And she would bathe us on a Saturday night. So that Sunday morning she'd line us all up to go to church. Yah.

P: Oh. Did you have big bathtubs? Or how, what did you, what kind of tubs did you wash in?

S: Well, now the house on Willie Street, as very youngsters, how youngster I don't remember, other houses we lived in, (bell chimes) we rented after, my father died when we were all young. So the house had to be sold. And we rented tenement houses. And there was, there was bathtubs. But we didn't have hot running water. (P: Umhm) So we'd have to pour it in with pans. We'd heat the pans on the stove and pour the hot water in the tub.

P: You said that your mother went to church alot. Was that the social life too?

S: Yes, yes.

P: For you?

S: Oh yes.

P: Ah, did the church have other activities besides just the church service?

S: Oh yah, they had other activities. Ah, then I went, I'd go to public school and then at 4:00, 4:00 to 6:00 I would go to Greek school.

P: So where was the Greek school? Was it near your home or?

S: No.

P: In your church?

S: Well it was in walking distance. It was in the church, yah. (P: Umhm) Rooms of the church were set aside for school. So we learned how to read and write in Greek. (P: Umhm) We spoke Greek at home too, because my mother, my mother's English was never too good. But she always spoke Greek to us and we answered in Greek.

P: What about your father? Did he speak English or?

S: Yah.

P: Would you speak English with him, or Greek, or?

S: Well see I was, seven, six years old when my father died. So I don't remember too much about my father. I know I spoke Greek with him. (P: Umhm) I know, because when I went into the first grade I didn't know very much English, very little. My mother says I did from playing with the kids, but I didn't know enough English because they kept me back in the first grade. So evidently I didn't know enough English (P: Yah, yah) (laughs) that's why they kept me back.

P: The children and the Irish children in the neighborhood, would you play together then, or did you kind of stay with the Greek children?

S: Oh, let me see. I'm trying to think. Um, the Greek girls were kind of sheltered. We were not let out of the house too much as we were growing up. Oh we had to stay home and were not allowed freedom as the boys were. My brothers were allowed to roam all over the city. (P: Hm) But my sister and I were not allowed to roam. Although by the time we got, and so we, we had friends with the kids we went to Greek school with. So therefore they were Greek friends.

We got to have friends later in Junior High School. You know, as we got older we made friends with other nationalities. And ah, not too much with the Irish kids because the Irish kids also had their own churches; their own parochial schools that they went to. And then when I went to the Bartlett School here in the Acre again on Wannalancit Street, there were not that many Irish kids in the school, because they went to parochial school. (P: Um) There were a few Irish kids, not too many.

P: What grades did you go to Bartlett School?

S: Well I went to the Cross Street School first through third. And that would be fourth to ninth grade at the Bartlett School. That's in Junior High School and then I come to High School.

P: Where did you go to High School?

S: Lowell High School.

P: Lowell?

S: Yes.

P: Umhm.

S: Was there anything else particularly, you want me to talk about my school days?

P: Oh, um (--)

S: Most of my teachers at the Bartlett School were English I would say, maybe Yankees? (P: Umhm) Like names were Murkland, and Wallace, and Atwood. They were some, a few Irish teachers who taught in the Public Schools. (P: Umhm) And the teachers in those days could not be married and teach. Because I remember one teacher, Miss Far... I think her name was Farley. There was a mother and daughter teaching there, but the mother was a widow and therefore she was allowed to teach. (P: Um) And the daughter taught. This was I think fifth and sixth grade they taught.

P: Were your classes large? Or how about how many students were in them?

S: No, they weren't large. I don't think they were, maybe thirty students or less, or less depending on the classes.

P: Umhm. And you say there weren't many Irish. That they went to parochial schools huh?

S: They went to parochial schools and there were very few French too. They were (--)

P: Umhm. So mostly Greek or what others?

S: Well there were lots of Greek, and there were Yankee kids that lived in that area.

P: Umhm.

S: Ah, or, well, I didn't know them as Yankee kids, but they were Protestant kids. And so that's ah, many of them. But there were a few, there were a few Polish, but not too many because they have their own communities in Centraville and Lowell Belvidere.

P: Umhm.

S: And the French had their own community in Little Canada. (P: Umhm) And they had their schools. So ethnic groups mostly stayed within their own self.

P: What about getting along in school? Like say at recess time, would you stick with the Greek children, or did you mix with some of the other children in school, other ethnic groups?

S: I don't re... (P: Unclear) I don't remember at the Bartlett School. I think we mixed with everybody in the Bartlett School. But I remember in, in Lowell High School that I was friendly with the Greek kids in Lowell High School. And by the way, in those days ah, there weren't too many Greek girls going to high school. They believed in educating the boys. Oh, they wanted the boys to go to college, but the girls would stop after they graduated from the Bartlett School and go to work.

P: After ninth grade or?

S: After ninth grade. I was fortunate (laughs) to go on to high school.

P: When you were growing up did you have chores to do to help your mother, or help her around the house to do things?

S: I had some chores, but she wasn't really too strict about the chores. (P: Umhm) Yah, I didn't have too many chores. She did try to train me to wash dishes, and things of that type, clean up. Saturdays, yes, Saturdays we use to clean the house. Yah, (P: Umhm) we use to have chores, and we use to have certain things we use to do. The girls, not the boys.

P: Did your mother have to work after she was widowed, or (unclear)?

S: No she was on mother's aid. So she didn't work. She was at home. Therefore she did all the housework and that's why we didn't have to do that much work. And that's why (-
-)

P: I see. What was mother's aid?

S: Well that was a State Aid they gave to widows. This was just for widows. Welfare was almost non-existent then. (P: Umhm) So this is what the State would give to widows.

P: Was this through the church, or the State, or?

S: The State.

P: You think it was through the state?

S: This was the state, yup.

P: And that was enough for you to live on so that your mother didn't have to go out and work?

S: Well she had little kids. She'd get (--) When I was probably, my brother was seven, I was six the next one was four, the next one was two, and the baby was three months, three months old. So she really couldn't go to work at that time. And ah, we (--) She couldn't get mother's aid until se sold the house. (P: Oh) Today they allow you at least to keep the house. But the house had to be sold, and it was highly mortgaged. So there wasn't too much money from that. (P: Oh) And then we had to list where we, where the money was spent.

P: Was your grandmother with you at that time?

S: No she only lived here for two years. She didn't like it. This was when my father was still living. She didn't like it and she went back. (Pat speaks at the same time, unclear)

P: Uh huh.

S: Maternal, maternal grandmother.

P: Oh it was your mother's grandmother?

S: Yah.

P: Your mother's mother.

S: Yes.

P: Um.

S: She didn't like it here so she went back. She had sons in Greece that she went back to, her sons. (P: Umhm) Or another thing I should tell you about my mother. When she left Greece, she left without her brothers knowing about it. Because the custom was, here

were five brothers. They were all younger than she was and she was about twenty one when she came to this country. So the custom was that they should, that the brothers should work and have a dowry for their sister, because her father was dead at the time. (P: Umhm) So all the men in the family is supposed to provide a dowry for the sister in the family, for the girl in the family. Oh the oldest brother, who was old enough to work, married a girl in Greece that he fell in love with, and he eloped with her. And she, well he married and didn't have a dowry, and therefore my mother felt that she would not have a chance to get married in Greece. But if she left it would be sort of an insult to her brothers; that they were not capable of marrying their sister off. (P: Umhm) So she left without notifying them.

P: But your mother knew? I mean (--)

S: The grandmother.

P: Your grandmother did?

S: Her mother new. I guess (--)

P: Her mother new, and helped her.

S: They faced the reality, you know, that it was impossible for her to get married. I understand she was a pretty girl. She had a nice soprano voice. (P: Umhm) She was a good candidate for a marriage, but she had no dowry. So therefore it was difficult for her to get married in Greece. And that's the reason why she came to America.

P: Did she come in through New York?

S: Yes.

P: Did both your parents come in through New York?

S: From Ellis Island.

P: Ellis Island.

S: Yes.

P: I see.

[Tape is turned off then on again]

P: Talking about your growing up years, could you remember some of the food that your mother fixed? What was your usual Sunday dinner?

S: Well I'll tell you our daily food was bean soup. We had a lot of bean soup. [Laughs] We had varieties of bean soup with nice crisp Greek bread. I still like the Greek bread. Now I like the bean soup. (P: Um) I had too much of it in the early years. And we couldn't afford meat. So we would have meat on Sundays, and it would be stews, sometimes some stew.

P: A lamb stew, or beef stew, or just different kinds of meat?

S: Ah, mostly lamb. (P: Um) Mostly lamb. (P: Umhm). Occasionally we had beef, but it was mostly lamb. When it was beef it was cooked differently. When it was lamb it was cooked differently again, and with vegetables. Oh talking about vegetables, we use to go out in the country. My mother had a friend whose family did farming out in Dracut I think. And he use to raise all kinds of vegetables. And we use to go out there when it was the harvest season. The whole family would go and we'd help pick the beans, we picked out our vegetables, whatever was ripe at the time. Now he had a wagon, a team and a horse, and he would put these bushels of beans, and squash, and turnips, or whatever he was growing, on his cart and he would bring it into Lowell everyday and go around the street selling vegetables. And he would go to each neighborhood and call out, "the vegetable man is here." And oh, the women would go down with their cans or baskets or whatever they had, and select whatever fresh vegetables he had for the day. We use to bring home a lot of vegetables. We'd have to go and visit. We were suppose to go and visit, but we use to bring home a lot of vegetables. [Laughs]

P: Did you have any kind of garden in the yard, as far as growing your own vegetables, in any of those places you lived?

S: Well only in the house we had on Willie Street. But in the other houses, we didn't have a garden. We didn't have a big enough yard to grow anything.

P: Did people have a lot of gardens usually in those days?

S: No, not in the Acre. There was no space for gardens in (--)

P: I see. Uh huh

S: They didn't have many gardens.

P: Talking about that, what kind of stores would your mother go to? What kind of grocery stores?

S: She, in the days that I remember, they were, A&P was in our neighborhood and it was a small store. And it was run by one manager and maybe one assistant. There were no supermarkets in those days. (P: Umhm) And she use to do all her shopping there. But if she wanted to buy something in the Greek line of food she would go to Dummer Street, or Market Street, which was the center of the Greek community and she would buy her Greek types of food there. For instance, I'm trying to think, lamb, lamb. And the type of

vegetables that they would eat. All kinds of vegetables but, greens, they ate, we ate a lot of greens. That's another thing. When we didn't have beans we had greens and feta cheese and bread. We always had the bread because the baker delivered the bread in those days. As did the milkman. And they delivered all kinds of food. Eggs and butter, whatever was needed. Or even if we went to the store, the grocery store, there would be delivery. Oh there was also delivery of ice in those days.

P: I was going to ask you what, you know, you kept your food in?

S: Umhm.

P: Did you have an ice box then?

S: Yup, we had a ice box. And there was an oblong card that we put out in the window to let the iceman know we wanted ice. And if it was the long way, that meant we wanted a twenty cent piece of ice. And if it was, the card was standing up, that meant the fifteen cent piece of ice. So he would cart it in. And sometimes when the people live up on the third or fourth floor, he was carting ice way up to those floors.

P: How long did a piece of ice last basically?

S: Well, maybe a little more than twenty four hours. Maybe more than that. Maybe two days, but it didn't last too long. It didn't keep the food too well.

P: So he use to come several times a week then?

S: Oh yah. He'd go, he'd come by everyday. (P: Oh, umhm) So it depended what other people wanted. That's why they delivered fresh milk everyday, because the homes didn't have the refrigeration. (P: Umhm) And then milk, the ones, people started getting refrigeration later in life, they would deliver every other day and then twice a week. And now they don't deliver at all. [Laughs]

P: Yah, yah.

S: But ah, when we had the ice boxes, they delivered daily.

P: And what about the bread? Was it Greek bread? Was it a Greek bakery that came around or?

S: It was a Greek baker that came around, and we'd tell him what kind of bread we wanted. They had hand kneaded bread and they had machine kneaded bread, or white bread or whole wheat bread. So we'd select whatever type we wanted. Most of us kids didn't want the brown bread, (laughs) the whole wheat bread, we wanted the white bread. Now the white bread was always fresh, and we couldn't cut it into small slices to take to school. For instance, when I'd go to high school I wouldn't take a sandwich, because I'd be embarrassed to take the thick slices of bread. (P: um) Today I think it's great!

[Laughs] But in those days I would be different, (P: Yah) so therefore I wouldn't take it to school.

P: So the bread wasn't sliced the way it is today?

S: No.

P: It was sold whole and then you'd cut it up.

S: No, you know how the Italian loaves come?

P: Umhm.

S: They're not usually sliced.

P: Yah.

S: It had to be, they delivered it whole. But the breadman, and the milkman and the grocery man, the Greek grocery stores, they were very good to the Greek community, to their customers. Because during the depression many people didn't, could not pay their bills, but they still delivered. And some of those bills were never paid, but there was never any retribution.

P: I bet.

S: They all, they helped each other.

P: Now were these, you said it was Greek Bakers. Were there Greek dairymen too?

S: Yes. Yup. And I remember one of our priest telling us then. They were also teaching, not only of religion, but everyday of life. Some of them, most of the people were not very well educated. So they would learn about living when the priest would give a sermon. And one of the things I remember him saying was that we should support the Greek merchants. Buy from the Greek merchants. We've got to support them. (P: Umhm) And you know it paid out in the end, because many of the people were helped out when they didn't have the money.

P: When times were hard.

S: Umhm. Umhm.

P: And you had to give back in that way.

S: So it did work out.

P: Umhm.

S: So I was starting to tell you about church before. I use to go to Greek School everyday for two hours. Saturday morning we'd go to church school. Sunday morning we'd go to services, and Greek services last about two hours. The priest would get up there and make a sermon, and he'd go for a half hour. [Laughs] And we were kids. We weren't, you know, interested. Then in the evening there were vester services and my mother always wants to go to that. And then they had other social events. They would have, they had plays. They had a group that put on plays. I remember my mother use to make costumes for the players. And they use to have, dances, social clubs. You know the Women's Auxilary and the Men's Club. So there were picnics. I remember in the early days we'd go to picnics, sometimes, the beach, sometimes to Westford, Nabnasset Lake, and other areas. And ah, I guess there were no buses then. They were trolley cars.

P: I was going to ask you about transportation and how you got around?

S: They were trolley cars and, but when we'd go to picnics they, the trucks. I don't know whether they hired trucks, or whether some of the parishioners who had trucks contributed them, but they put benches in the trucks and that's the way we transported to the outing grounds.

P: Umhm. How about when your mother would go to the store? You said she used the A & P. How? Would she walk to the store? (S: Yah) Was it within walking distance?

S: It was in walking distance, yes. Yah, the Greek community was within walking distance. Now on Dummer Street and Market Street they had a lot of coffee houses. Everybody talks about the coffee houses. (P: Umhm) In the summer the men would take their chairs and sit outside and just sit out there, and you know, just talk. Now each coffee house had, usually they were from the same part of Greece. They either knew each other, and they knew their region and they were all interested in politics and discussed politics all the time. They waited for the daily paper to come in. Every coffee house had a, the Greek Daily paper would come in. Also the local papers, the English papers. (P: Umhm) But they were interested in the politics of Greece. And the churches had problems here, because the one, the main church, The Holy Trinity in Lowell, which was the central church, changed. They either came down that they were to change from the Gregorian calendar to the Georgian calendar. So many of the traditionalists didn't like the idea. They wanted to stay with the old calendar. So the ones that wanted to stay, go with the new calendar, they moved away and go to another church, which was the Transfiguration. That's the one that my family went to. And then later from this main church, The Holy Trinity, eventually changed to the new calendar. And another small group, they wanted the old calendar left and started the St. George's Church. And then St. George went with the new calendar and they changed. [Laughs] Another small group went and opened up another church. St. George Church is now up in the Highlands here, on Princeton Boulevard. And the Mary, St. Mary's is on Butterfield Street. And that's the small group that has remained with the old calendar. They're the traditionalists. But along with this church policy changes there were the political changes that brought these changes about in Greece. And therefore the Greek in Lowell were following the politics there and splitting up. Mostly politically rather than for religious purposes.

P: Were women ever allowed in the toffee houses, or was it mostly just men?

S: No, no. Just men.

P: It's like a men's club?

S: Just men.

P: Really.

S: In fact, my mother, because she was a widow, and even I as a girl, I never use to like to walk past there, because all these men were out there. I'm sure they would talk about people going by. (P: Um) So we avoided walking by there. My mother was very careful, her being a widow, that nothing was ever said derogatory about her. (P: Umhm) So she avoided going where the men were.

P: Did they sell anything else beside coffee in the coffee houses, I mean was it a bar also where they would sell liquor?

S: No bar. No bar.

P: No bar?

S: No bar, but I think during the Prohibition, (P: Umhm) I think they probably served that liquor in the coffee cups, (P: Oh yah) instead of the coffee. I have a sense that they have. Maybe I heard that they had. And, because there was bootlegging in Lowell. (P: Umhm) Um, I was aware of it even as a little girl.

Tape I, side A ends
Tape I, side B begins

P: You were talking about what you remembered with the bootlegging as a little girl.

S: Okay. I went into this home. I don't know how I was there, visiting probably. And I wanted to go to the bathroom. And the adults looked at each other and I didn't know what it was about. So I, they said, "okay." I went to the bathroom. And as I was sitting at the toilet I watched the still that was dropping wa... the liquor drop by drop. It would drop very slowly. It would drop into a basin that they had there. I knew what it was even though I was little, I knew what it was. And they were making this moonshine in the house.

P: Maybe that's where they get the name bathtub?

S: Bathtub gin?

P: Gin, right, (S: Yes, yes) right. Because maybe a lot of people made it in the bathrooms.

S: Very likely, yup. Well these were old houses that didn't have indoor plumbing at on time. And when they did put toilets in, I don't think there was a bathtub in that room as I remember. I just remember a toilet. And it was in a big room. They probably took the smallest bedroom in the house and made a bathroom out of it. Although there was no bathtub in there, all I remember is a toilet. And then I saw that dripping. (P: Ya) But maybe there was a bathtub because they had to have water. Maybe there was. And they had to have hoses connected to the water, I think. I'm not sure, but I do remember the drips coming down.

P: You knew what was going on and maybe sensed that it was illegal or something?

S: Oh I think I knew. I probably had heard it somewhere.

P: Umhm.

S: And then later I heard of other cases. I heard of one man who was a sort of a kingpin. He was making, having some of the unemployed family men who didn't have jobs, and they would do this for him. In this person's house that I went into, I think that was the case, because he was there when I was there. Now I don't know if it was Sunday or not but there was one.

P: Was this during the Depression, or maybe (--)

S: This was during the Depression.

P: During the Depression.

S: Yes, yes, when they were unemployed, and made money that way. Eventually some of his men went to jail. Well at least I know of one, but this big man never got caught. He just made a lot of money. So I thought he was a kingpin growing up. I thought he was the one, the only one in the Greek community making it. But two months ago in August I went to a hairdresser and I saw a woman there that I knew as a child in the same neighborhood. And I said, "I remember your father having a truck." She says, "Yes, we had a truck because we had a house in Chelmsford, and we had one in Lowell. My friends went to school in Lowell, so I went there." She said, "My father was a bootlegger." And that kind of surprised me, because I wasn't aware of it. She says, "I was so embarrassed in those days, but now I think back and I say, well we had a lot of money then so it was all right." So there were others besides the one that I knew, knew doing bootlegging.

P: Were you aware of any conflict in your neighborhood when you were growing up between maybe Greeks and other ethnic groups. Now you said you had to stay close to

home but your brothers had freedom to roam the city. (S: Umhm) Now did they (S: Well I don't think that they had) talk of any (--)

S: Conflict, except I remember in the neighborhood we had snowball fights against the Irish kids. You know, it would be the Greek kids on one side, and the Irish kids on the other side. You know, it would be the Greek kids on one side and the Irish kids on the other side. And I don't remember that type of conflict. I don't remember if boys had any other problems. We didn't, I don't remember as girls having the problems. But I do remember hearing stories of the Irish throwing stones or pebbles at the Greek mill workers. Now it may have been during the time of the strike or something, but they were throwing stones at them. So there was conflict.

P: Do you remember the mill workers? Or what can you (--)

S: Oh yes, I knew a lot of people in the mills. (P: they were working in the mills, yah.) Yes, lots of people. Yah! See when I remember them, the mill work was not steady. They would work for three months, this was during the Depression, and then they'd be out of work for awhile. And the husbands and wives both worked because it wasn't continuous salaries.

P: Umhm.

S: We couldn't depend on it. Sometimes both the husband and the wife were out of work.

P: What did people do in that case when they (--)? Did the mill give them unemployment or?

S: Oh no. No unemployment in those days. That came later. No unemployment. That was after Roosevelt day, the unemployment. Ah no, no it was the merchants that supported them. They would buy food on the cuff. And they may be out of work for three months, and when they'd go back to work they would go whenever they got their paycheck on Saturday, would go to the Greek grocery store. There were Greek grocery stores on Market Street and Dummer Street. DeMoulas was one of them, and he was very good to the people, the DeMoulas father. It's the boys that have the supermarket now. They would go to their stores and they would buy on the cuff. For three months [unclear]. So when they'd go back to work they would buy their weekly supplies when they got their paycheck, and they would pay towards their debt. (Chimes ring) By the time the debt was paid up, then they were out of work again. So this kept going on for several years. So it was very difficult for people to get ahead at all. And I remember that everybody was helpful to the other people. If one family was working and the other wasn't, they would be helpful. They would loan them money, loan them coal, because we heated the house by coal in those days. Loan them wood, sometimes just give it out right. Everybody was in the same situation. So they all helped each other. (P: Um) They were very friendly. So anybody who had a steady job in those days was fortunate. And there were people who worked, because they were, I think it was 30% unemployment. That's a large percentage. Then 70% were working. (P: Oh yah) So I

happened to be in the neighborhood of the 30% unemployed. That's why I saw a lot of this going on. My brothers left school soon as they could because they had to go to work.

P: They didn't finish high school then? They left early.

S: Oh no, the boys didn't because they had to work and it was difficult getting jobs.

P: What kind of work did they do?

S: Well my, one of my brothers would, when he was young, he was still going to school. In the summer he would work for one of these peddlers, like the man I told you that was a friend of ours. So this one man, he sold apples. He happened to be a Jewish man. Sold apples on his wagon. And my brother, who was a young kid at the time, would deliver the apples to the second, third floor. You know they'd, the women would call from the window, give me three pounds of apples, or a bushel of apples and my brother would deliver them. At the end of the day all he got was a bag of apples to bring home. So (--)

P: For pay? That was his pay?

S: That was his pay. So jobs were difficult. But my oldest brother went to work. We had friends who were in the restaurant business. Greeks all open restaurants they say. [Laughs]. (P: Umhm) When two Greeks meet they open up a restaurant. So we had, the [grandparents] of all of us kids had grocery stores, I mean restaurants. So he went to some friends of ours in Brattleboro, Vermont and he learned, well he learned the restaurant business, how to cook. Then he went to another friend in Johnstown, New York, and he also learned to wash dishes and cook. You know he was like a kid when he went, and he started at the bottom. And, so that's what he learned to do, he learned to cook. (P: Umhm) He became a cook. He eventually had a restaurant of his own and my younger brother went to work with him.

P: What kind of jobs did you have after you finished high school?

S: When I finished high school I went, we had a very good friend who was a trustee of Lowell General Hospital. And she, her husband was sick and they had a private nurse and I use to go visit them. They were interested in us after my father died because he was an artist. (P: Umhm) They took his paintings to the Museum of Art. They were there for seven years. And she was Mrs. Carney, whose husband was Trustee at Lowell General. Said, "What do you want to do?" And I said, "Well I'd like to be a nurse." So after high school she sent me with the private nurse she had for her husband to Lowell General Hospital to be accepted as nursing. But I was short at chemistry. So they suggested, "Why don't you work as a nurse's aide and go to school nights, Textile school at night and take that up." Well I went and worked as a nurse's aide. So that's what I did after. (P: Umhm) But I worked so many hours. I worked, I think I started at seven and I worked till two. Then I had a two hour break. Then I went and worked from four to six. I was too tired by that time to go to school nights. So I worked there for a few years and

as soon as my sister got a job that paid more than I did, I quit there. Do you want to turn that off because my door bell (--)

[Tape shuts off and begins again]

P: How long did you work at the hospital?

S: I worked about three or four years at the hospital. Then I left and I couldn't get another job. Jobs were very difficult. I couldn't even get a job going through high school, to work my, you know, very difficult to get jobs. Then I worked in a coffee shop. Coffee, no a donut shop on Central Street. That's where I worked. And then I worked, during the war or just before the war I think they opened up a parachute factory in Lowell in one of the mills. So my sister got a job there and she got a job for me. So we were inspectors of parachutes. So I did work in the mills, if you consider the parachutes mill. (P: Umhm) And I worked there and then I met my husband. I got married and left.

P: I see. How, how did you meet your husband?

S: He was, he was in business for himself. He was a jewelry designer in New York, and he came to one of his clients here, to one of his customers to bring some things to sell to him. He was also the salesman of his own company. And that business person was a mutual family friend. And I met him through that.

P: So your husband was Greek?

S: My husband was Greek, born in Greece. (P: Umhm) He was born in one of the Greek Islands. [Unclear]

P: Were you married right here in Lowell?

S: I was married in Lowell, yes, uh huh.

P In Lowell, and then you moved to New York with him.

S: I moved to New York and I lived there for fifteen years in New York. Our son was born there. And then I went, we went to Greece for three years. And then we came back to Lowell. So we've been in Lowell, I've been in Lowell most of my life.

P: Most of your life.

S: Yes.

P: What changes can you tell me about that you've seen in your lifetime?

S: Changes in Lowell?

P: In Lowell.

S: Oh there were many changes, because electricity was not prevalent in those days [Laughs. Well I remember when Lindberg flew the Atlantic Ocean. Airplanes were not prevalent either. [Laughs]

P: Did they have some special celebration here in Lowell for that occasion when he crossed the Atlantic?

S: No no. They didn't have a celebration but it was in all the newspapers. Oh, they use to sell newspapers in those days. And if there was something special, for instance, Lindberg landed, paperboys would be out in the street calling, "Lindberg landed, Lindberg landed!" And you know, we'd go out and buy a paper for two cents. The Lowell Sun, the Evening Leader, or the Lowell Courier Citizen in the morning. That was the morning paper.

P: Would you have papers delivered to your home too? Or was it strictly paperboys selling them on the street?

S: Oh, well we weren't buying papers in our home. I don't know whether they delivered them in those days. But there was always a paperboy on the corner selling papers. And they were only two cents in those days. And everybody bought papers. That was the only form of communication. We didn't have a radio until much later.

P: Umhm. Can you remember the first radio that you had?

S: Well we were (--) Now this friend of ours, Mrs. Carney, came to visit one day. And she said, "You don't have a radio?" And we said, "No." So she had a friend of hers who had put a radio together to give us a radio, and we were teenagers by that time I think. And we used to listen to the radio shows, the comedy shows. Jack Burns and Gracie Allen, and Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, all the old time people.

P: You said you remembered the Flood in 1936?

S: Oh yes. I remember the Flood, and the Hurricane at that time. The Flood was at , we lived up on Pawtucket Boulevard, just across from where the bridge, new bridge has just opened, the temporary bridge. On the corner of Townsend Avenue and Pawtucket Boulevard there was cute little cottage there. We had an acre of land. Oh, that's when we had a garden. I forgot. We had a big garden then. We age well those two, three years that we were there. My mother and I used to do the garden. And we raised, even raised a big, we raised chickens and all kinds of vegetables. Peanuts and everything you can think of, strawberries, and everything. We had plenty of land and we worked it. And I don't like farming since then [laughs], because it's a lot of work. But we did raise all of these things. And we did live there. And the house was very nice, but we had a flood in 1934 I think, and there was, it was dangerous, you know.

P: Because it was right on the river. (S: Yes) Right on the Merrimack.

S: Right, right.

P: It was a nice area. I'm sorry we moved from there, but we used to walk into the city to high school. We used to walk in. Although there was a neighbor of mine who, that same neighbor that used to deliver the vegetables, he lived down the street on Townsend Avenue, he had a big farm there. And he had a buggy and a horse. He still has his horse and his wagon, because he still went out. And he had a buggy, two-seater, three-seater buggy, and he would go into town, in Lowell. His son was going to high school, and he would drive him in, and I would get a ride. But we'd make sure he dropped us off a long way from the high school. We don't want people to know we came in by buggy!

P: Like the horse and buggy.

S: Right, right. So that was the tail end of the buggy season.

P: And then cars started coming in after that.

S: Right, right.

P: Can you actually remember seeing the river flooded then during the (--)

S: Oh yes. That house that I lived in was carried away. We moved away. And in 1936, that house, I saw part of it down by the falls. The river did take it away.

P: Oh, yah, yah.

S: The river did take it away.

P: It's good you weren't still there.

S: I know. But we would have gone up to high lands, you know, up on Varnum Avenue, which was higher grounds. What they use to do, every year they'd come around and warn us about the flood and we'd go up, we had friends up on Varnum Avenue. All the people along the river were warned of the floods, and we'd move away until the flood threat was over.

P: What about the hurricane in 1938? What do you (--)

S: Well I remember the winds, because I was working at that time at the Lowell General Hospital. I remember crossing the School Street Bridge and how windy it was. That's my, what I saw. There were trees down, there was damage done, but ah, the flood was the big problem. After that they put a dam up the river, in New Hampshire I think, and they haven't had any floods since then. So now we could live on Pawtucket Boulevard,

and like it and enjoy it. That would be nice now. (P: Yah,yah) Right across from the river.

[Tape turned off, then on again]

S: One of the way of, one of the big ways of entertainment in the Greek community was on a Saint's day. There was St. Andrew's day, or St. Nicholas' day. And the head of the household was named Andrew for instance we'll say. He would hold open house and all his friends would go visit him. Usually his friends were from the Greek community. They'd go visit. And I remember one particular house we went to visit. They served, the women are served pastry, Greek pastry that they make, and the men are served odeurves and wine. And they had music. They had a "Victrola that you wind up by hand, the Victrola. And you put the record on and it played. (P: Umhm) And everybody gets up and dances. And they dance with gusto. And the kids in the neighborhood, the French kids, because this was Hovey Square. The French kids came around and other, I think there was some Irish people there too, kids, would come and look in the windows to see what was going on. They just didn't know what was going on. All this music. And of course the music was played very loudly. (P: Umhm) I don't know if the neighbors ever complained but ah (--)

P: What kind of dances would it be? It's not (--).

S: Was the line dances.

P: The line dances?

S: Yah. They do have dances where there's just two people dancing. They call that a ballet. (P: Umhm) Balleto they call it. Ah, but ah, different music has different types of steps. And everybody seems to know the steps, because man and woman will dance, and even the children. Everybody was encouraged to dance. So you begin to get the rhythm after awhile. (P: Umhm) So you just get up and fall in step. The leader would twirl around and do his own thing and the rest would follow in a line.

P: Talking about holidays, how did you celebrate Christmas? Did you have any special customs in your family, or in the Greek community to celebrate Christmas?

S: Well they had a Christmas tree in the church, and they had Christmas parties for the kids, and they had a Christmas celebration in the church. And there was an exchange of gifts but um, it wasn't big gifts. It was not one of the big Greek holidays.

P: Oh it's not?

S: No, the big Greek holiday is on Easter.

P: Um.

S: Because on Easter Christ was risen. Therefore that proves that it's a joy of occasion. So what, the traditional way is that you fast forty days from meat and dairy products, and some of (--)

P: During Lent? This was during Lent?

S: During Lent, right. Most of the old timers would do it. But it came down to only four, one week for most people. And you would fast up until the, just before Easter. Saturday before Easter you'd go to Communion. And all week, all that Easter week there were services, special services, special prayers, special events going on in the church. Sort of the life of Christ was being played out. And on Friday, Good Friday, they had a bier that was all in flowers and they would, the churches would go out and parade with this, with the altar boys and the priests, and the choir. And sometimes they'd hire a band in the days, and they'd play [unclear]. And we school kids, the Greek school kids would march along, and the whole Congregation would march along. They would do it around the common. There were years where all four churches got together and also the Syrian Church, because they're Orthodox Greeks, Orthodox Christians. And they would get together, each one bringing their own bier that would be decorated with flowers.

P: Are you saying bear ?

S: Bier.

P: Spells B-E-A-R? Animal bear?

S: No I'm saying B-I-E-R I think.

P: Oh a bier!

S: Yah, a bier.

P: Oh.

S: All right? (Both laugh) Not the type you drink. All right, and they would meet there. And then all the choirs would get together. They'd have the services outdoors. This was at North Common, because all these churches are around the Acre anyway, around the North Common. And then they'd parade back to their churches. And then at the end of the service, and the church, everybody would be given a flower. Usually carnations or any of those types of flowers that they would take off. Now these people would have, before that, had decorated the whole church in black. (P: Umhm) It was in mourning, with the death of Christ. (P: Umhm) On the Thursday before it would also be, they'd show how Christ was taken down from the cross, because they had a big wooden cross, and a wooden Christ upon a cross, and they could unscrew it and take it down. So the priest would get up on the ladder and take it down reverently, and say all these prayers. (P: Um) So all week you know, it was led up to Saturday night, which would be the big night of Easter. On Saturday night they would have the services. And when the clock

struck 12:00 all the lights would go out. And then the priest would come out in the dark and say, "Receive the light." So he'd have the lit candles and all the parishioners would light their candles. They'd all come in with a candle on Saturday night. On Friday night they'd come in with a brown, a yellow candle. On Saturday it's a white candle. And they all celebrate. And everybody comes in with their new clothes, their Easter clothes, Saturday evening. So at midnight the place lights up and then they start singing, "Christ has risen." And it's the whole Congregation. It's a joyful occasion. Everybody's happy. So everybody goes home at midnight, after midnight services and they have a big meal.

P: And what type of food would they usually serve?

S: Well, of course the big thing was the Easter Soup, what they call it. It's made with meat, and scallions, and dill, and it's made with egg and lemon sauce. And it looks like cream sauce, but it's not.

P: It sounds good.

S: Oh it's delicious. And that was the way you break your fast. And then everybody had the red eggs. The eggs had to be red because that shows joy. Not colored eggs as we had in the other religions.

P: Oh, is the skins off [unclear]? It's been hard boiled, but dyed with beet juice or something?

S: Yah. Dyed with dye, you know. You can buy the dye and that's what we used. So everybody, each one takes a red egg and then you have sort of a game. You try to crack the other person's egg, the point of the egg. (P: Oh yah) And whoever ends up with the egg that's unbroken is the lucky person. (P: Umhm) And then they have (--) Oh and another thing I meant, I forgot to tell you. They carry that light home from church, no matter where they lived, whether it's walking distance. Usually it was walking distance in those days. Some people had cars. You take that light home and you light your vigil light with it. So you have this light at home all the time. Everybody in their homes, they have icons, holy pictures in a corner, like a little tiny chapel. And they have a night light that's lit all the time. The way they would light it would be with, they'd have a little water in a little glass and about just a little cover of oil and a wick and they would light that every night and it would light all day.

P: So this was done throughout the year? Not just for the (--)?

S: This was done throughout the year. Now this light that they brought home from church was like that vigil light. So that they could keep that light going all year long so it would be good luck. So then they have, besides the Easter soup, and then you invite all your friends and relatives, whoever you want for that midnight meal. And (--)

P: Any special meats, like they have, you usually associate Easter hams. Now would they any (--)

S: Lamb.

P: The lamb.

S: We still eat the lamb. Pascal lamb, yah, for the Greeks. But usually you don't eat that much at night after breaking your fast. (P: Ya) But you do eat meat. And, but you haven't eaten meat for forty days, or for a week. So you really look forward to it. And then the next day is the big meal. You have lamb. You have vegetables, and salad and cheese. My mother used to make homemade cheese. And I'm trying to think of all the other things.

P: Some good desserts are good for (--)

S: Oh yah, all kinds of pastries.

D: Pastries? Yah.

S: Oh yes, all kinds of pastry that you would, you know. I don't know if you know some Greek pastries, but.

P: Umhm.

S: They have baklava,

P: Baklava, yah.

S: (Says Greek word), and (--)

P: Would your mother make all of that too?

S: Oh yes, she was good at it. She used to make a lot of that. And every family has it. Oh, and the main thing was, they make these little cookies like a donut, but they're cookies. So whoever comes to visit you on Easter, or a few days after Easter, when they leave your home you give them one of these cookies. They call them (says Greek name) and a red egg. You give that to any guest that comes in after Easter. So that you're still celebrating Easter for forty days. And in church you go and you sing the glorious song that "Christ is Risen" and ah, they're celebrating it for a long time. So that is the big holiday.

P: Bigger than Christmas really for them.

S: Oh yes, it's bigger than Christmas. There's no exchange of gifts, it's just that it's a big religious holiday for (--)

P: Would you have a Christmas tree at Christmas?

S: Oh yes!

P: Uh huh.

S: Yah, we had a Christmas tree but I don't know that that was a Greek tradition. We had it because this was the American custom.

P: American custom?

S: Everybody else had it.

P: Would you put a, hang a stocking up for Santa Claus? Or did you believe in Santa Claus or (--) ?

S: Well I remember, yes I remember we used to hang stockings, but that's not a Greek tradition. (P: no) But we use to hang up Santa Claus stockings. But in Greece they don't give gifts at Christmas. They give gifts at New Years, because it's St. Basil's Day. And they started doing that here. The children go around to the homes and they sing special songs on New Year's Day. Then the master of the house gives them whatever he wants to, either a little gifts, or little coin, or something. They did start that in the early days in Lowell, but that wasn't too successful in Lowell. But that would be a Greek custom. The exchange of gifts is not a Greek custom at Christmas time.

P: Yah.

S: But it's done, and now it's traditional because everybody does it.

P: Can you remember any of the other holidays? Did they have a big Fourth of July celebration here in Lowell? Can you remember or (--)?

S: Oh yes.

P: Uh huh, parades and things?

S: Oh yes, they always had parades. And they had a carnival up in South Common. That was traditional. Every Fourth of July they had these, a carnival, at South Common. That was part of the celebration for the Fourth of July. Everybody went to that. They had rides and chances like as they do with all carnivals. Everybody looked forward to that. Balloons and hotdogs and candy. What do you call that candy, cotton candy.

S: Yah, they had all those in those days. And I was talking to somebody else and they said they remembered there was one black person who would go to the carnival and stick his head back in a sheet and the people would take these hard balls and throw it at him. And I remember they use to say, this was, they use to say, "hit the coon and get a cigar".

This is what the saying was. And there weren't many black people. I only know of one family that was black and (--)

P: That lived in Lowell during the time that you were growing up?

S: That lived in Lowell, at least the ones I knew. There may have been others, but in the Acre I only knew of one. Although there was a black teacher at Bartlett School. She was in the seventh grade and she taught the brightest class in the seventh grade at the Bartlett School. So there was a black teacher there, her name was Miss Lew, but I don't know where she lived and, she must have lived in Lowell. But that was not the family that I knew. I knew the Edmonds family. And I talk to other blacks now and they say the Edmonds family is still living in Lowell and they're kind of the leading family of Lowell now, because they were early settlers.

P: One of the originals?

S: Yes. Let's see. Let me tell you about the railroads. Not the railroads, the streets were all cobblestone streets in those days.

P: Oh?

S: And ah, there were rails in all the streets. And the cars went to, from downtown Lowell they spread out to the different areas, where the buses go now, but not quite as far as the buses.

P: There weren't any buses then. All the public transportation was by street car. Now were they pulled by horses, or were they electric or ... ?

S: Well they were pulled by horses before my time. I knew them when they were electric. And I know at the end of the line, the conductor would get out and pull up a long, worn down and change it and put it up, there was a wire overhead and he would get it connected with that, and then the train [unclear]. And we'd change the seats to face forward.

P: You remember that too.

S: Yah, and then he would go off. And it was only five cents a ride in those days.

P: So that was really the main transportation then?

Tape I, side B ends

Tape II, side A begins

P: This is Pat Coble. I am continuing my interview with Sylvia Contover on October 30, 1985. We're going to talk about some of the jobs during the depression years in Lowell.

S: Sure. I'll tell you that it was difficult to get jobs during the depression, because the mills were going out at that time. They were moving south and there were not many jobs. The shoe shops were in, but there still weren't too many jobs. My (--) I got the job at the Parachute Factory because we were beginning at that time to support the war in England. We hadn't got into the war yet. And my brother, my youngest brother couldn't get a job, So he left and went into the army. He thought it was glamorous. He was going to be stationed in Hawaii. And my other, my middle brother went into the Reserves that they had here, the National Guards. And the President said the National Guards would never be sent out of the country. It just happened that my brother Arthur who was in Hawaii, was there at the time that they bombed Pearl Harbor. So he's now considered a Pearl Harbor survivor. And my brother Stan who was in the National Guard was also sent overseas. Both these outfits, my brother's outfits both went to Guadal Canal. So my brother Arthur (--)

[Tape is turned off, then on again]

P: You were talking about your brother, and both your brothers being in Guadal Canal.

S: Yes. My brother Arthur was coming out of the battle, and my brother Stan knew that Arthur's outfit was there so he was trying to locate him. And they met as Arthur was coming off the battle ground with his outfit, and my brother Stan was going in. And Arthur said, "Oh, I'll never see him again." But fortunately they both came back. They did win silver metals, and bronze metals. So they were heroes. In those days everybody was going into the service if possible. I wanted to go in, and my sister wanted to go in, but we still had my mother at home. So it was decided that my sister needed to get away more than I did. So she went in the service. She was in the WACKS and later in the (WAFS?). And my oldest brother who was married and had two children, also joined the Navy when he was, towards the end of the war, because it was the patriotic thing to do. Everybody was going into the service. So the four of them were in the service. I was the only that didn't go into the service. So when they came out they all got jobs in the government, worked for civil service and now they're retired. They have a nice little retirement and they're enjoying their leisure. I was the only one that didn't go into the service, but not that I didn't want to. I also wanted to go. Maybe it was the, that was a one way of getting out of our environment. We wanted a change, we couldn't afford to go to college and that was one way of doing it. So I wanted to go to college when I graduated from high school, but I knew I had to get a job. And I supported my mother while the others were away. Although they also sent stipends home to my mother. They all supported her. Family was close knit. And that's the way my family handled the war situation. We all did our patriotic duty. [Laughs] And you know, if you didn't work, if you were not in the service then you should be working in the defense plant. It was a war that everybody supported. It was unlike the Vietnam War that we had a few years ago. Now what else did you want to know about?

P: Did they have blackouts here in Lowell? I can remember those when I was growing up. Were there air raids?

S: Yes. I really don't remember the blackouts, but they must have had them. I don't remember what they said about the blackouts, what we did in those days.

P: Turning out the lights, and putting, at night at a certain hour, and putting blankets over your windows if you did turn them on.

S: Yes, but you know I don't remember that. I remember hearing about it, but I don't remember doing it. I do think we had black window shades on the windows so that the lights would not show outside. But I don't think it was that enforced here in Lowell. I don't remember it that much. We did have rationing of course. We couldn't get sugar easily. We couldn't get, meats were rationed. We had to buy them with stamps if we had, they issued stamps. And it was not always successful. The stamps were not successful because if you knew the right party, if you knew the butcher, the butcher would give you meat. In those days there was a butcher, and there was a dairy store and there was, the grocery store and the fish store. They were all separate. They were not merged into this big supermarket we have today. And everybody did their shopping daily because of the refrigeration. We didn't have much refrigeration.

P: Talking about shops, could you tell me about some of the other shops along Merrimack Street? Where you bought your clothing, or other items other than food?

S: Okay. These shops, it was Bon Marche downtown. That was the big store, and Cherry & Webbs, where Cherry & Webbs is now. Jordan Marsh had gone in the building that Bon Marche was in at that time. Oh there were, Five & Tens were very prevalent and things did sell for five and ten cents. Later they went up to a dollar, but in those days they did sell for five and ten cents. And those were in Kearney Square in downtown Lowell. And that was the hub hub of Lowell, where all the street cars ended their run or started their run from. And there were two large cafeterias, the Waldorf and the Plaza Lunch. Plaza Lunch was very popular. Everybody went there, workers, professionals, they all went to the Plaza Lunch. And across the street from that was Page's Lunch and Candy Store. But the Plaza Cafeteria was the central point in downtown Lowell. There was Brockleman's Market, which was large market, almost like a supermarket there. That was the largest one they had in Lowell, in the corner of East Merrimack Street and Central Street, or Bridge Street. There were other stores on Central Street. There were movie houses downtown Lowell. And you could get in, you could run into the movies for ten cents then. But evidently they weren't getting too many people during the depression. And I remember one of the movies on Appleton Street I believe, or on Middlesex Street. Ah, I think it was the Crown Theatre. For five cents on Saturday morning, you could get in and get a candy bar besides. That was the way of filling up the Theatre. And of course the movies were starting, the talkies. Everybody went to see the serial movies on Saturdays. But when the talkies come in, I remember our Greek priest took the class that we went to school, to see the first talkie movie, which was Al Jolson. And we thought it was an historic event that we should go see it.

P: Do you remember going to see that?

S: Oh yes. I went, I remember and it was very exciting to go and see the movies. To a talkie movie.

P: Now were you allowed to go to the movies every Saturday? To the serial movies with your sister or your brothers or?

S: I was not allowed to go, but my brothers were. (Laughs) My brothers would go. If they did chores around the house they got a nickel, but we girls never did. We were brought up differently. The boys were brought up differently than the girls were brought up, because in the Greek system the boys were supposed to take care of the women in the family. They're the ones that are going to go out and work and take care of the family. And the women would stay in and take care of their needs at home. And it didn't always work out. (Laughs) But that's, the people who had come over from Greece tried to instill that in us. And the boys were allowed to go out on dates, because, but of course they were expected to date Greek girls. And that really, they weren't allowed to do too much dating, even the boys. And the girls were not allowed to date. If they dated they would definitely have to date a Greek boy. But, you know, we went out (--)

P: Was this when you were say, out of high school you could start dating? Or could you date while you were still in high school?

S: Actually you weren't suppose to date at all, but if we dated our mother didn't know about it. [Laughs] But we were not aloud, especially the girls. The girls were not allowed to date.

P: And you were encouraged to date Greek boys?

S: Oh yes, it should be a Greek boy. But that's the same in every community. The Irish families wanted their kids to date Irish kids. The French the same way, all the ethnic communities. And I think it's mostly because of the ignorance of the other people. For instance, my mother didn't know what the Irish were, you know, what they believed in. I'm sure they were Catholic. They were similar to the Greek Orthodox religion, but at the same time they didn't know it was similar. They thought their religion was the only one worth it. I'll tell you another story about religion. My sister-in-law was telling me that when her brother went to the Church of All Nations on Worthern Street, they encouraged the kids to go there. They had basketball, they had games for kids, and they took children of all nations there. And sometimes they gave them goodies. Well his father gave him a beating when he went home when he found out he went to that Church of All Nations. Because he said. "What they do is put the picture of Christ on the floor and step on it," the father said. So it was ignorance on the part of the Greeks.

P: What denomination was the Church of All Nations?

S: Well I don't know, it's just general.

P: Oh I see.

S: It was just (--)

P: Was it like a community center with just that name? Or was it actually a church?

S: It was a church. It may have been a denomination, I don't know. But (--)

P: Umhm. But it wasn't Catholic or?

S: It wasn't Catholic.

P: [Unclear]

S: It would have to be some type (P: Protestant) of Protestant church.

P: I see.

S: And they did encourage the kids. And around there, because there were Greeks living in that community, they invited the Greek kids in. And I went there and I went to a Sunday school class they had there, and they were very nice. Of course they didn't step on Christ. [Laughs] They were just trying to explain religion to us. Not trying to tell us that our religion was bad, but they were just explaining it their way, to kids. (P: Yah) But this is what, this is what happens when you don't know what the other people believe. And that's what happened to my sister-in-law's brother. So there were conflicts about other religions in that respect.

P: Umhm. Mostly with the parent it sounds like, rather than with the children themselves.

S: Yes because the children are open to everything. But it's the parents that would have the prejudices.

P: Umhm. They want you to date your own and keep away from the other churches.

S: Right. Oh, and I know the Catholic kids would not come into a Greek Church. Oh, I know that definitely. They thought that was a terrible thing to come into a Greek church. And oh, now Catholics will go into a Greek church, and they'll go into any other church. But I suppose it was the parents again that told them the same things. That the Greek church believed in strange things. But religions are all the same practically, the Christian religions.

P: Getting back to shopping and clothing and such. Where (--) Would your mother make your clothing, or would you buy it in shops or?

S: My mother made the clothing. She would have friends, like this Mrs. Carney that I tell you about her, she would give us her dresses, silk dresses. I remember particularly one nice brocade bathrobe that she had, and my mother made it into a coat for me and dyed it red and had the little ribbon hanging down the back, which was the style in those days. And it was a luxurious looking coat! And she would cut down, we had other friends, I told you we had friends who were in restaurants. And the men would give my mother their suits and she would cut them down for the boys. She did all the sewing. She would go to the Turkey Farm, which happens to be Nicki Sarantis's mother's farm and buy the feedbags. The feedbags were printed in those days. And she would make little cotton dresses for us out of the feedbags. And I've talked to Nicki about it and she remembers it. Other families did the same thing. And also, the mills would sell cloth. sometimes it was through the employees. If we had friends who were employed there, they would buy material for us. Sometimes they had shops that we could go in and buy.

P: Were these seconds, or (S: Maybe they were end pieces) discontinued patterns, or end pieces?

S: Maybe end pieces.

P: Yah. And they were sold at a reduced rate than if you had gone into a Cherry and Webb, or one of the downtown stores.

S: Right and the Merrimack Mill had beautiful corduroy velvet. It was beautiful material. And I remember buying corduroy from there. I remember my mother buying it and making clothes for us, coats. And I remember the woolen mills, one in Collinsville I think, would sell woolen materials. And she would go there and buy material. I think you could go with the street car there. And she would go and buy material and make clothes for us. She made all our clothes. And I use to hate her clothes you know, because the shoulders were low. I don't think she made them to fit. I think she made them so that we could get into them the next year. [Laughs]

P: Umhm, Umhm.

S: And now I wish I had home made clothes, (laughs) you know? She was pretty good about copying designs. If she'd see a picture in the newspaper of a dress that she thought was pretty, she was pretty good about copying the design. The only thing I remember, the shoulder line was a little too big for me, and that, and I'm sure it was because she wanted me to grow into it and wear it again.

P: What type of sewing machine did she have? Was it a peddle type?

S: Peddle type. Yes, definitely a peddle type. She also did a lot of handwork. The women from the Merrimack Mill particularly, since my mother didn't work, she had time, more time than other women, they would bring thread from the mills. Now I don't know whether this was end of spools or discarded. I don't know what it was, but they use to

bring it. And she has made bedspread and tablecloths, crocheted them. And these were from the mills these would come. And I had some beautiful cotton bedspreads that were crocheted by her. I still have them. (P: Oh!) Oh and by the way, thinking back, my mother, when she was in Greece, had made her own dowry. She had made woven blankets and embroidered, and other things that she embroidered with preparing for her dowry. And she brought them here and I still have them. (P: Oh!) She never used them. I haven't used them because I don't want (unclear) them up.

P: So she did other kinds of handwork besides crocheting then?

S: Oh yes!

P: She did embroidery?

S: Yes, there was, downtown on Market Street somewhere there was a factory that made childrens clothing. And they use to make it with smocking. They embroidered smocking. I don't know if you know that type of embroidery, (P: Umhm, yup) on these young girls dresses. The dresses sold for \$25.00 in those days. And women would take this home and work on these. So my mother did work like that. Oh, I remember her making the smocking on these little dresses and putting little lace on the collars. She did work like that. I always remember other times, it just came back to me, when they would bring buckles home to do. Women who were at home to work on them, buckles from shoes. I don't remember exactly what with them (--)

P: Would they cover it on with material maybe?

S: Ah, I don't know. Somehow I remember some shiny beads on them. Ah, we worked on them too. You know, every, the whole family worked on (--)

P: Was this like cottage industry?

S: Yah, it was cottage industries, yah, right, right. With the, the buckles I remember and the dresses, the embroidered dresses. They also in those days use to embroid their curtains. All the curtains were embroidered with a special type of stitch.

P: Umhm. I was going to ask you about, some more about the house and how it was decorated.

S: Okay.

P: Did you have a living room or a sitting room?

S: Yah, well it was a parlor.

P: Parlor.

S: They called it a parlor and that was always closed off and we only opened it up for company. And so the furniture never wore out.

P: What type of furniture was it? What, do you remember the furniture?

S: I can remember furniture. I think all the furniture was given to us by different people. I remember some, it was not upholstered furniture as we have now. A lot of the frame work showed. Wasn't the type of furniture that was (--)

P: Was it horsehair type?

S: Yah, that type. Right. And some of the, we had, I'm trying to remember a table we had that was an oak table with, the legs had balls at the end of their feet. I don't know what, victorian type? But it looked like a parlor. It wasn't, there was a rug on the floor in the parlor. The rest of the house, the kitchen had linoleum, always had linoleum on the floor. Those wear out fast. I know why, because they, I think they were washed all the time. I remember living, when we lived on the second floor we always had to get out and scrub the stairs every Saturday. That was one of our chores. We'd scrub the stairs with a brush so they looked really white. That was a weekly chore that one of the two sisters did. And let's see the rest of the house (--)

P: Would you eat most of your meals in the kitchen so most of the family life was rotated around the kitchen?

S: Yes, because that's where the heat was. (Laughs) In the winter that was where the heat was. The bedrooms were always cold and you'd freeze when you get up in the morning.

P: Would you sleep with your sister, or did you have your own bed?

S: No, I slept with my sister. And my two other brothers slept together, and my younger brother slept with my mother. So we did have bedrooms. It was sparsely furnished. They were just the minimum furniture. Like a bed and a chair. I don't remember bureaus. Maybe we had bureaus. I don't remember any. I remember closets.

P: Oh, I was gonna say, what did you keep your clothes in?

S: We must have had bureaus, but it wasn't elaborate. We didn't have anything on the floor. Sometimes maybe a scatter rug in some of the beds. I think we did have scatter rugs, because if you didn't when you got up in the morning it was cold, the floors were cold. And we dressed warmly. And oh I remember because in the early days it was so cold we didn't have heat, the schools didn't have too much heat either, we always wore a woolen knitted vest sort of (clock chimes) under our clothes to keep us warm. And I know the boys wore those long johns in the wintertime to stay warm. The girls didn't.

Oh and I remember there were still pigtails. The girls still wore pigtails, but we didn't. Our mother was a little more modern. We didn't wear, but other friends wore pigtails. And in school we use to have the pens, the ink wells. And sometimes the boys would sit in back of a girl with a pigtail and dip the end of her hair into the ink well.

P: I was going to ask you what kind of toys you had? What? Did you have a doll, or what, what (--) When you (--) Since you said you stayed home and played a lot, what type of toys do you remember playing with, or games that you played?

S: I don't even remember playing. I do remember having a doll. This Mrs. Carney again, at Christmas would bring us dolls, one Christmas she brought a doll. I remember my mother use to always make, embroider some pillowcases for her. We would take it over for a Christmas gift to her, because she was always so nice to us. So she always made something, handwork for her and we'd take it over. And she would feel so obligated that she would go out and buy us toys and (--)

P: A little toy, uh huh. Did you jump rope, or play. Were there ever any games like that maybe?

S: Oh yes, we (--) Yes. Jump rope and jacks. Remember the jacks? Yah, outdoor games. And then bouncing the ball against the wall. That type of game. We played baseball with the boys. Oh, hide and go seek. We played that at night. Every neighborhood had the kids playing that. Oh thinking about that, we played with all the kids in the neighborhood, hide and go seek, at night after dark we played, but in the neighborhood.

P: Umhm.

S: And there were Irish kids, and Greek kids, and it didn't make any difference when we played games. But I don't think that the kids visited into the different homes. I don't think the Irish kids came to visit the Greek kids, or the Greek kids the Irish kids, in the home.

P: Umhm.

S: Outdoors we played together. (P: Outdoors, yah) So I think that the, it's the parents wouldn't allow the other nationality kids to come into the home. I think that's what (--) (P: Umhm, more than the children, yah.) Yah, because the kids played together. Because I remember those games, and I remember you know, we went out with other boys (laughs), boys that were not Greek. So it was just the parents I think that were keeping this prejudice up.

P: Did you play paper dolls, or you say you had a doll. Did you, you know, I was trying to think of some other things that little girls do at home.

S: Well all right. We did have paper dolls. We use to cut them out of the paper. The Sunday paper, in the comic section always had a doll and her clothes, and we use to cut that out every week. Yes, we had paper dolls. I've forgotten the things that we had as a child, and you're reminding me of them. So we had the same type of games I think that some of the children play today.

P: How about card games? Did you play any card games or ?

S: Not as kids we didn't play card games, at least I don't remember playing any card games, not as kids.

P: What did your mother do besides, for her social life besides going to church and her sewing. Would she have other women friends that would come over?

S: Oh yes, yes. Yes, she use to bake bread. And ah, she use to make our bread a good deal of the time. And when she was making bread, she'd make enough for, five, six, seven loaves of bread, because they were five of us.. And then she'd make Parker House rolls, and she'd send one of us to notify the friends to come over and have coffee and rolls. And they'd come over and have coffee and rolls and butter. And I've heard people who did come to the house say that that was the best time in those days. All they had was bread, butter and rolls and that was great entertainment. And my mother did play cards with her friends. Not intricate games, but she did play cards. But (--)

P: Is there any kind of card game that is popular with the Greeks? Did they play dominos or chess, or?

S: No, they don't play dominos, or chess as far as I know. They don't play dominos or chess, but I do know that men are gamblers. The Greek men are gamblers. And they did have (--) Oh I should tell some of their clubs, like the Democratic Clubs that they have. Politically, they have they're mostly Democrats, except the ones that are in business for themselves. And there are quite a few Greeks who have been in business for themselves. They are the Republicans. And the Professionals are Republicans. But the majority of Greek (--) And they have this Democratic Club and there I understand, they played cards and they gambled.

P: Now this was more organized than the Coffee House, or larger or?

S: Yes, but I think in the Coffee Houses they also played cards. And I think they gambled in the back room, if there was a back room in the Coffee House. Because I've heard or raids. I remember reading in the paper of raids in the Coffee Houses. That's one thing I remember and that was for gambling. They were great gamblers. They were not great drinkers. For instance, they wouldn't get arrested for drinking, for being drunk on the street.

P: Like you hear about the Irish more. They're know for their drinking.

S: Right, right. They (--) Yah, the Irish you hear of frequently being picked up because they drink, but the Greeks would be picked up for gambling, because that's always been illegal. So ah, I remember reading in the paper frequently about that. And I remember they're talking about the church, the Holy Trinity going bankrupt twice. One time they told me that it was so bad that the women, they had put out a sheet and they were holding it up and the women would take off their gold wedding bands and putting it into the sheet so they could pay off the mortgage of the church. This happened twice that the church was almost, the Holy Trinity was almost bankrupt. Somehow they pulled out of it.

P: Umhm. What about the use of drugs? Was that, oh, like smoking the pipes, what are the name, the Turkish pipes. Was that another thing that was accepted in the Greek community or?

S: I think it was accepted. I think, because they did it in their own country, but it would be older people. But I do remember in Lowell on Suffolks Street as I walked by there was, I don't remember if it was an older, or an older woman smoking this. And I think I've seen somebody else in Lowell smoking it.

P: What is the name of the pipe? Does it have a name? Turkish pipe [unclear]?

S: An opium pipe. In Greek it's called (says Greek name). This is, I think they put water in the pipe and then they put the opium, or whatever else they put on top and they just sit there and they smoke. And they look calm. They don't get upset over it. And I haven't seen a Greek in Lowell smoking it, but I have seen them in Greece. Not too frequently, but it's accepted in their culture. It's nothing that's wrong. But it seems to be only old people that do smoke them, (P: Umhm) whatever in the culture. The young people didn't.

P: Um, talking about some of the professional people in Lowell. o you remember what Doctor you went to? Or was he a Greek?

S: Yes.

P: Uh huh.

S: We went to Doctor Stamas, who was a Greek, and he was very good to us. And he again was told by Mrs. Carney that whenever he came to our house, my mother was frequently sick, they were not to charge us. He never charged us. He never charged any money.

P: The doctor made house calls in those days?

S: Oh yes, boctors made house calls. (Laughs) Sure! That's gone out, but they use to in those days. And ah, he didn't charge and he was very good about it until we were all older and working, and then he decided to charge. There was another Doctor Vurgaropoulos. There was another Doctor Gatsopoulos. There was a Doctor ah, I can't

remember his name now, Generalis. And his three, two sons became doctors I think. Two or three. One of them was the first space doctor. He worked with Doctor Von Braun. (P: Umm!) So, that's interesting (P: Yes!) that he came out of Lowell. Now I think that that son was an immigrant also. I think he came over with the father. I think he was born in Greece, I'm not sure, but he grew up in Lowell. And I went to school with his sister who later became a teacher. So there were a lot of doctors and there were quite a few lawyers. And one of the lawyers became the first Greek Mayor of Lowell. George Eliades was his name. And the Greeks got into politics. They were always interested in Greek politics and I guess that was transferred to American politics, Lowell. And you know Governor Dukakis' family came from Lowell. And my mother was familiar with the family. She knew the family well. And then the Tsongas family was from Lowell too. So you see the Greeks did get into politics. (Laughs).

P: Got into politics.

S: Yes. So they're (--) So professionally there have been many doctors who have come from the Greek community, but they have not come back to Lowell. Wherever they went in training or the internship, they stayed there because it was better opportunities for them. But I think that most Greek families can claim doctors who have grown up in Lowell and lawyers. There still are Greek, first generation professional men in Lowell. (P: Umhm) They're born here, or they've been, or second generation.

Tape II, side A ends
Tape II, side B begins

P: And she's going to tell me now about some of the other things she did for entertainment.

S: I don't know that I necessarily did them, but I was thinking of the Opera House. There was an Opera House in Lowell in upper Back Central Street. And it was popular. Many people did go to it. I couldn't afford to go to it, but, and I was younger in those days. But I do know many people who did go. And there was the Parker Lectures in Lowell. This Mr. Parker has left money so that lectures are run in Lowell every month during the winter. And it has brought in many important lecturers. And we always attended those. They usually are on a Sunday afternoon. So it was free and most people in Lowell would go to them. They're still continuing. They still have them in Lowell. And they publish the programs. So we use to see these films or trips, travel logs and lecturers. Singers would come in to Lowell. Concert singers, opera singers, pianist. So we did get a variety of entertainment, live entertainment, outside of the movies. And then everybody in Lowell, all of these ethnic groups had their own little groups to have plays. We didn't go to each others plays, except maybe the "Paint and Powder Show". But most of the ethnic groups had their own plays and their own members of their community would go to them. Outsiders would seldom go. Of course when it was in Greek language I just couldn't understand it. When it was in French nobody else could understand it.

P: Were there church festivals as such, or say Greek festivals when (--)

S: No, they were not, they were not festivals as such, as they have today. But they did have bazaars, and those bazaars were held annually. But again it was the same type of people that would go to them. It was not people of other ethnic groups. It was a close knit community and I don't know whether they didn't allow outsiders in, or the outsiders didn't want to come in, but it was a self enclosed community. They were supportive of each other, the community was. And for instance, in our case, because my mother was a widow and we were often, we were allowed to go take Greek lessons without paying, whereas the other members of the community had to pay to send their kids to school. And they had other ways of helping people out.

P: Now if you wanted to take a trip into Boston what would that involve? How would you get into Boston?

S: We would go by train. We would take the Trolley and (--) Actually we didn't take the Trolley, because we were always within walking distance of the depot. That's what we called where the train was. But because even if it was long distance, you would walk to save that nickle to the depot. And we would take the train in. I remember one time I went in with my mother, because we had friends in Boston. We'd go visit them. Or once in awhile she'd have to take one of us into the hospital, Mass General, for whatever problems would arise. We did have hospitals here. And I remember one time we went in and there were taxis lined up, but there was one horse and buggy taxi. And he came up to us. I guess we looked vulnerable and we went that way. That was our taxi.

P: Did you have to change trains between Lowell and Boston?

S: No.

P: You could go directly?

S: Yes.

P: How long did it take? About an hour or more?

S: Yah, about the same length of time it takes now. One time, coming back from Boston my mother and I were snow bound half way between Boston and Lowell. We spent the night on the train with the other passengers. And there was no heat on the train. And I was a little girl, and I remember there, one of the passengers had cookies and they gave me cookies. But we did spend the night on the train. When we arrived in Lowell there was a lot of snow. They had plowed the streets and we could get through. Well, when I say plow the streets, that doesn't mean the way they plow them now, because there was still a lot of snow on the ground. But they were long, high piled, maybe because I was little.

P: Do you remember how they plowed them? Did they um, have trucks or? I wonder how they plowed the streets in early times when they had the horse and wagons.

S: I don't know. Well they had sleds, sleighs then. Oh that's another thing we had in the old days, sleighs. Another form of entertainment was sleigh rides in the winter. People would go, they'd hire a sleigh and a large group would go on, they got a lot of hay on it and they'd go for a sleigh ride. That was a winter sport that everybody did.

P: Would your mother allow you to go on anything like that or?

S: Well if it was a church group, yes.

P: If it was a church group.

S: Yah.

P: What about ice skating on the (--) Would the river freeze in the (--)

S: Oh yah. The river froze and they use to have the ice. They used to cut ice from the river and sell it. They would store it in the Daniel Gage's house, warehouse, and sell the ice to the people. They use to have horses right on the river cutting the ice. I've seen pictures of that too, but I saw it. There was skating on the river, but there's skating in the ponds around here. They use to be cold winters and everybody went skating.

P: Was ice hockey popular with the young boys then?

S: No.

P: Or is that a newer?

S: No. That's new. Yes, there was no ice hockey, but there was skating.

P: Umhm.

S: And ah, they use to go every night, where ever they had sledding.

P: And you said sledding and (--)

S: Oh yes, the sleds. Everybody had sleds. For Christmas people got sleds. That was one thing that everybody got, the sleds so they can go down the hills. And there were a few hills around. There were two druggist in Lowell that were Greek, and I remember my mother taking my brother to one of them. He use to be the consultant, the doctor, before anybody would go to a doctor, because they wanted to save money and they wouldn't go to a doctor. They would go to this druggist, his name was Vozeolas. Now his sons have become druggist and also have a drugstore. He would tell the people who would go in what was wrong and if he had some medication, ointment ah, he would give

it to them. My brother's case, he had something on his eyelashes that he thought was serious and he told my mother to take him to Mass General Hospital in Boston. Ah, so he would make referrals, but everybody went to him before they would go to a doctor. And there was another druggist, Shagarouli and he did the same thing, but this Vozeolas was the prime person people went to when they had a problem with their health. Another thing I can tell you about health. There was a friend of my mother's who was a maiden lady, and she could use practical medicine, herbs and other things. Supernatural things sometimes. For instance, if my sister would get sick, which was frequently, my mother would say it was the evil eye and her friend. So we would go to this woman and she would have a glass of water, and put a drip of oil in it and if the oil spread then my sister had the evil eye. If the drop held together, she didn't have the evil eye. So if it spread she would, this woman's name was Aspasia, she would do a little cross over it and that would be the end of the evil eye and then my sister would get well. Frequently she would be well by the time we got home. So that was attributed to the success of the performance.

P: Would your mother have to pay this woman?

S: No, no.

P: For her services?

S: No, no. No paying.

P: Umhm.

S: One time I fell and broke, or twisted my wrist and rather than paying a doctor we use to do things like that. So she said, "Oh I can fix this." So she strapped my wrist. And I can see it. See it's still of a little bit, see. And then, because I was working as a nurse's aide in the hospital, and she said to me, "I will teach you all that I know, but you can't tell anybody else, because if you tell anybody else you would be, you will lose the touch." And she said, at that time my sister-in-law was sick with yellow jaundice, and she said what you do in a case like that, it's easy to cure she says. You just cut, make a cut with the razor under the tongue. Well, when I heard that I said, "I don't want to learn about how to cure people." [Laughs] So she did practice this home medicine. And evidently herbs that she may have alleviated a stomach ache. Another thing she would do is, if they had, I don't know whether it was pain in the stomach, then the naval was twisted, and she would twist the naval. She would put her finger in the naval, and have the person lye down, and walk around slowly with her finger in the naval. And evidently that cured people, because once in awhile they'd go back to her for that.

P: So what, did she act as a midwife at all?

S: No, she was not a midwife. No, other people were midwives, but she wasn't a midwife.

P: You said your mother just had her first child in the hospital and had the rest of them at home.

S: Yes.

P: Would she have a midwife then?

S: Oh yes, yes.

P: Or did the doctor come to the house?

S: No just midwives.

P: Just midwives.

S: A Greek midwife,

P: Umhm.

S: Who knew her business from Greece. She was more comfortable, my mother was more comfortable with her than she was with the doctor, because she didn't trust the nurses in the hospital. Of course, later she was sick and in the hospital many times and she learned to trust the nurses.

P: Umhm, but just for childbirth?

S: Yes, just for childbirth.

P: Did they, do you know if they gave them any type of anesthesia, or did they have natural childbirth, or?

S: Oh, I don't know about anesthesia, but I'm pretty sure it was natural childbirth. It was expected to be natural childbirth. And other relatives were in the house as I remember from my younger brother being born. Others were in the house, and they would be up there assisting the midwife. And they would take care of the baby. And everything seemed to have worked. It worked! We were all born well. So it worked, but ah, that's what the fear she had. She didn't have to go into a hospital again to have [unclear].

P: Did your mother ever talk to you about anything like that? About having children or was that, or would she wait until after you were married?

S: About having children?

P: Well I mean did she tell you the facts of life, or did she um?

S: Well about, maybe the night before, couple of days before, she said to me she wanted to talk to me. And she said that, "Well, I want to tell you about marriage, you know, what it's about, what you have to do." I said, "I know, I know." I really didn't know. But she said (--) So I don't know who had prompted her. Somebody, some other friend in the house, to talk to me. And she, I heard her say to, she left the room, went in the other room, and she says, "Oh they know all about things these days. I didn't have to say anything." [Laughs] But she was embarrassed and I was embarrassed. So it's difficult for a mother to tell her daughter these things.

P: Oh right, right. Had she told you anything about childbirth, or what you would have to go through when?

S: No.

P: Was she still alive when you were pregnant with your son?

S: Yes, yes. She didn't tell me anything about childbirth. If it came up in the conversation she would talk about it, but not about sex. She wouldn't bring that up in the conversation. But ah, I had to learn on my own (laughs), because I was too embarrassed to say I didn't know, and she was too embarrassed to tell me what she knew. (P: To tell you what she knew) But that's the way we got treated in those days, especially with health problems.

P: Umhm. What about a dentist? Did you, did they have dentists, or did you go to the dentist often or did you see the, go to the druggist again first?

S: Well, I don't remember. I remember many people would remove their own teeth rather than go to the dentist. Put a string around and tie it to a door knob, and the door knob closed rather than pay a dentist. But when we were children in school, in primary grades, there was a dentist they had in the city for school kids, and I think we use to pay five cents to have our tooth extracted. So we really didn't get good dental care, but they did, there were dentist around, but the care wasn't that good.

P: I remember you telling me one time that once a Greek woman is a widow that she wears black. So I would presume that your mother wore black?

S: My mother wore black, oh, for about fifteen years, and black stockings. And then she said that she was having problems with her feet, and the doctor said that she shouldn't wear black stockings anymore. I think that was just an excuse. She wanted to get out of wearing black stockings and I think it was just an excuse. And she started lightening her clothes up. She would wear dark blue or a little print in the dark navy blue. She started to lighten up. We would ask her to, you know, as we got older, and she felt that if we wanted her to. See we weren't smart enough to insist on it earlier.

P: Yah, yah. Well I guess too that living over here it was a lot easier not to follow with those customs than if you had still been in Greece. [Unclear].

S: Well for her, after fifteen years, but she felt she had to follow them because she was living in a Greek community and they would say that she was wearing bright clothes because she was looking for another husband. You see, you have to mourn your husband for life. Yes. So she was very careful about that.

P: Did she have any relatives here? Any brothers or sisters that came over? Or was she the first one in her family to come over?

S: She was the first one in her family, but she did bring her mother as I told you, and her mother didn't stay. And then she brought her oldest brother whom she left from, she had left secretly. She did bring him over and his family, but he was (--)

P: Did he come to Lowell?

S: He came to Lowell with his family, but he was not successful here. In Greece he had a coffee house and he lived pretty well. But when he came to the country he had a coffee house in Lowell, but I don't think he did too well. The family did not prosper.

P: Umhm.

S: There was illness in the family. He died young, he didn't live too long. And the kids didn't get too much education. So it wasn't successful for him to come to Lowell.

P: Talking about the coffee. Is it a special kind of coffee that they drink? Is it like an espresso?

S: Yes. It's a finely ground coffee. When my mother use to go to the A&P to buy coffee, she use to buy the Bolka coffee or the Eight O'clock Coffee that the A&P had, and because the manager was Greek, he would grind it fine for her so that she could use it like Greek coffee. But she was one of the Greek people that started the American coffee in her group, among her friends. She started drinking American coffee and introduced many of her friends to it. And ah, some of her friends had never had American coffee, but she got them to drink the coffee along with her Parker House rolls.

P: Yah. Would they perk it, or drip it, or how, do you know how they made it?

S: Well they (--) Oh how they made their coffee? It has to be made especially in a copper pot. Small pot, it's copper and you can make about two, three cups the most. And you add, we put the, say a half a spoon of coffee and a spoon full of sugar. You ask a person, how do you like it, sweet, medium or bitter? And then you cook it for them the way they want it. And you let the, you'd mix them up with the water, add the water, and let the water boil, but not come to a boil. Just before it comes to a boil, because the top has to have that foam. If the foam breaks, it's not good coffee. The foam has to be smoothe on the top. So when you pour it into the two cups you make sure you have the foam on there too. So you just, you let it set for awhile before you drink it. And then

you sip it gradually, you sip it. And the grounds, the heavy grounds remain at the bottom of the coffee.

P: So there's a real art to making it then?

S: Oh, there's an art to making it, yes.

P: And do they serve it in a tiny expresso cup too? It's not a regular (--)?

S: In a demi tas cup.

P: Demi tas, uh huh.

S: And then after that, you can, what they can do, some people can do, and I can do it because I have fun with it once in awhile. It's been years since I've done it. You turn the cup, coffee cup over and you have your conversation when you're visiting. This is what the ladies would do when they visit. Oh after say twenty minutes or so the coffee would drain and make patterns in it. So you would read their fortunes.

P: Oh!

S: It's just like reading tea leaves.

P: Yah, yah.

S: I had an aunt who did it, who knew how to do it. So I was fascinated. I asked her to show me. And she taught me how to do it. And she says to me, "Don't believe anything." She says, "But this is it. This is a sign of a letter, this is a sign of a trip, this is a sign" So she told me the different signs. And I used to do that a long time ago. You know one time I predicted the woman was going to have a baby, and she wanted a girl. So I told her she was going to have a girl and she was so pleased when that happened. Her husband was a hat salesman. So she gave me a gift of a hat afterwards. Ah, you don't, you do it for fun not for money. That's not for money. And I predicted another woman who was going to have a son, because I knew that's what she wanted. [Laughs] So she gave me a pair of silk stockings in those days. So that's the way you worked that system, but it's fun. And then when you do it for the young women, you tell them about the handsome young guy that they're going to meet. And that's the way those fortunes were. But they do have that custom. That's what the ladies would do when they visit each other in the afternoon and have that coffee. But since my mother gave up having that Greek coffee, or Turkish coffee as they referred to it as Turkish, we haven't been telling anybody's fortune for years. [Laughs].

P: Because you wouldn't have coffee grounds.

S: No coffee grounds, right. So they have these little customs and little things they played with to have fun.

P: Umhm. Yah. Does your mother have any memories of her growing up days in Greece?

S: Oh yes. She'd tell us many things.

P: That you want to tell us about, or anything in particular?

S: Well I don't think it would have anything to do with Lowell. That's why I didn't think that it would be interesting. It's just the customs that they brought over here and that what I'm talking about, these customs. And it seems that in Greece they mostly have the same customs. I'll tell you about another friend, a family friend again who, the husband is usually head of the family. You do what he says. Now in this one case, the name is, why not say it, the name is (Danatakos), the father was dead. They came to this country. The mother is here with her two sons. The oldest son got married. The daughter ran away and got married with somebody that they did not like. A Greek man, but they did not like him. That's why she had to run away and marry him. Well that's a disgrace in the family.

P: When the daughter runs off and marries someone, yah.

S: Because she may have slept with him before she got married in the church.

P: Oh, uh huh.

S: So that's a disgrace. So when the mother was mentioning, the mother, everybody lived together, the mother, the married brother and the single brother and the sister. When the mother would bring up the daughter's name after the daughter left, the son who is now head of the family, the married son, forbade his mother to ever mention that girl's name again. She just was not a part of the family anymore. She was being punished for not doing what the head of the family said.

P: Were they ever reconciled?

S: No. She left for, I think they ended up in California and she did well. But the brother would still have nothing to do with her. The younger brother got in touch with her, and the younger brother reconciled with her, but the oldest brother didn't. And she just was there, she never had children. Her husband died, she died alone. She left money. She didn't leave it to the family. Oh I think, yes, she did leave it to her brother, the younger brother, whatever she had, yah.. So that's what happened in that case.

P: That's a very patriarchal society.

S: Yes. And this is a particular part of Greece that they come from. Now this happened in Lowell. Another relative of their's, the same family tree, the parents in Lowell had two daughters. The daughters were born in Greece too. They came over as young children.

The oldest daughter got married and of course you have to wait in line. If there's an older girl, she's got to get married before the younger girl will get married. You always have to wait your turn. The oldest daughter got married in this case. The youngest daughter fell in love with this other man who was from the same home town in Greece, but he was a rival (branch?) of the family. There had been a murder in the family. And therefore she could not marry somebody into that family because he was the enemy. Well she wanted to marry him. So they ran away and got married. Now this is Greeks they had married. Greeks is not another nationality. And the mother would have nothing to do with her for years and years. Now it happened that the oldest daughter got sick, had a mental condition. And when the mother was left alone this girl, who had been turned out of the house, took her mother and took care of her in her old age. The mother had lost her sight, this daughter took care of her. But she was put out of the house never to be discussed again in the house. And she went to live with her husband and his mother. You always take care of the mother. You always have, you have an extended family usually. (P: Umhm, Umhm) The older people were always taken care of and usually respected.

P: Do you think that the Greeks are similar to the other ethnic groups in this? Or do you think this is something that's just typical?

S: Ah, what? Taking care of the others?

P: Well, just a lot (--)

S: If they married outside of their nationality?

P: Yes. Aha, yah, yah.

S: I really don't know. I really don't know if others did that, or whether it was just the Greeks that were so strict with their family. It's such a patriarchal family that the husband, or the brother in this one case was the head of the family, you just do what the men say in the family. Although the women often run the household and they get around their husbands, and usually get what they want. But still if the man says, you know, this is to be done, they have to do it.

P: They have to do it?

S: Yes, they have to respect him. So these two cases I know of very well, cause I know the people in both families.

P: Umhm, yah.

S: And it did happen. So they're very strict.

P: Umhm.

S: The Greek families were very strict. They took care of their people. And their children got married, they went all out! They still try to give them homes. You know, even in this country, and they give them big gifts. Oh, and always, you always had a big wedding. Greek weddings are always big weddings. You invite all your friends. Of course now, these days friends that are not Greek are also invited. And they have a lot of food, lot of dancing. And the Italian weddings are the same type. I've been to Italian weddings there. You go out (--) Now a days they go out to a restaurant, or a hall and they have the big meal. Then afterwards, after the big meal they have this other sweets and stuff later. If you were dancing all night they have another set up. So they have a lot of food going on, and eating.

P: Now who pays for this? Does the bride's parents pay for the wedding, and all the expense of the reception and everything afterwards?

S: It all depends. It's not a custom that the bride's family should pay for it.

P: Oh, it's not part of the dowry either? (S: No) [Unclear]

S: No, no. No, because part of the dowry (--) The parents would rather give this money for whatever to the daughter rather than have a big affair. So if they both decide to have a big wedding then I think they both contribute. Sometimes they do.

P: The groom's family and the bride's family?

S: Yah, the groom. Sometimes the groom's family pays the bill.

P: Umhm.

S: So it's not expected of the bride to pay the whole amount. Usually they split it. Or if somebody has more people they want to invite, and sometimes that happens, they will pay a larger portion of the bill. But they get their children started out. They don't let them [unclear] around without any money. Course they make sure that they're working too. Yah, they're work oriented. Just as other nationalities are too. Other ethnic groups work too. I don't think any of the groups in Lowell are lazy. They may not have jobs (--) You know in those days there were no jobs, but they were not lazy. If they got a job they worked. And they worked long hours and they put a lot into their work. But from what we read the French group seems to be the best workers. They don't demand anything extra, they just do.

P: They just do the work.

S: But they're all good workers. All the ethnic groups in Lowell.

P: To skip back, you said that your father had worked in the mills when he first came here. (S: Umhm) And he was a dyer?

S: Yes in a leather factory in Lowell. When he came this is the only job he could get. He went to the factories, to the mills. And in this leather factory they said, well since you're an artist you work with the dye to dye the leather. And this is what he was working, in these vats and you know. (P: Umhm) And not good working conditions and he got cancer. I think it was cancer of the stomach. And he had a broken arm that he had gotten from the place of work too, before he died. And it developed in to cancer.

P: Yah.

S: I'm sure the fumes of those chemicals didn't help much.

P: Right, right. But he only worked a short time in the mill and then he found other work or?

S: No, no that's (--) He worked since. That was his job in Lowell.

P: Oh, uh huh.

S: Yes, that's all he worked on in Lowell, because that's all the work he could find. See he couldn't get jobs in New York to do any paintings. So he wasn't going to get it here. Although he did (--) He was commissioned to do a Greek Church in Schenectady, New York. So he did paint a church. The paintings for the church there in Schenectady, New York. He did things like that.

P: You said he did mostly religious paintings?

S: Oh yah, always.

P: Always.

S: That's the only type he did. So he did do art work.

P: Umhm.

S: He did do, but most of the time was in the mills, because you know, he got a family so fast. After that, right after he was married the children started coming, and he had to work and support them.

P: Right, right.

S: It must have been difficult for him as I look back, because here he was in a sheltered monastery in his young life. About ten years I would say he was in a monastery from the age of eighteen. And ah, here he comes into this industrial environment here and has to work in you know, the factory in a shop like the leather, in the leather mills I guess they called. So it must have been difficult for him to adjust.

P: Did he live in a boarding house, or did he live with friends when he came here?

S: I really don't know. He must have lived in a family because that's what the Greek bachelors did. The families would take in boarders, yes. So he must have lived with a family at that time. I really don't know where he lived before he was married. And I think he was here about three years before he got married. So I guess he made up his mind if he's not going back to the monastery, he's going to stay here, he might as well get married and settle down.

P: Yah. So he must have been in his thirties then when he got married?

S: Yes, yes he was. And he was (--) Oh, I don't know whether he was forty two when he died. Something like that. He was a young man when he died. It was hard for my mother too, because here she was left with all these little (tikes?). She didn't know the language. She hadn't been out working because she's been having babies right along. So it was very difficult for her. So you see, it was the supportive Greek Community that she use to fall back on. They were very good that way. She did have support.

P: And they kept her going even though she had no family here, no immediate family.

S: Oh yah. They were like family, especially the godparents of the children. See, the godparents of the children become family. They're called [unclear], like the Italians. And they become members of the family.

End of Interview